

Weekly Market Bulletin

State of New Hampshire
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From Your Commissioner...

New England Lands Listening Session on National Animal ID

Under pressure from Congress and food safety critics to do something about the stalled National Animal Identification System (NAIS), Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will hold a series of listening sessions on NAIS.

USDA is seeking to hear from stakeholders and producers not only their concerns about NAIS, but also potential or feasible solutions to those concerns. According to a USDA press release, the information and ideas gathered will assist Secretary Vilsack in making decisions about the future direction of animal traceability.

Vilsack has said USDA needs to hear from stakeholders as it works together "to create an animal disease traceability program we can all support." Individuals and organizations are encouraged to voice their concerns, ideas and potential solutions by either attending a listening session or submitting comments online.

The listening sessions will include information about the current program, as well as an opportunity to give public testimony or ask program-related questions. Discussion sessions related to NAIS' cost, impact on small farmers, privacy and confidentiality, liability premises registration, animal identification and animal tracing will allow producers to provide their input on ways to make the program into something they can support.

The NAIS listening session in Connecticut is scheduled for Wednesday, May 27 in Storrs, Conn. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m., and the session runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Stakeholders may pre-register for a session at NAISsessions@aphis.usda.gov

Additional information can be found at www.usda.gov/nais/feedback.shtml. Written comments will be accepted by USDA until August 3, 2009. Go to <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/feedback.shtml>

Last week two House Subcommittees held a joint public hearing to review the NAIS. The Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry, chaired by Representative David Scott of Georgia, and the Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology, chaired by Representative Yvette Clarke of New York, held a joint hearing to examine the identification system's role in protecting U.S. producers and consumers from the effects of an animal disease outbreak.

The hearing follows the release of a 400-page cost-benefit study of NAIS, including breakdowns by species and size of herd or flock. The full report and a 30-page overview are available on the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website.

All farmers can empathize with pork producers, who have suffered steep financial loss and stress all because the H1N1 influenza virus got tagged as 'swine flu.' The new strain of flu is not a food-borne illness, and is actually a blend or hybrid of influenza strains of swine, bird and human origin. But don't confuse people with the facts! Several Asian and other countries immediately banned North American pork imports.

In a conference call last week with state agricultural authorities, Secretary Vilsack noted that pork prices had dropped \$7/hundredweight (from \$61.69/cwt. to \$54.71/cwt) in just one week following the first reports from Mexico of the new flu. May pork futures were off by \$13/cwt. This disastrous turn in the markets followed on already depressed prices resulting from the global recession.

Mexican consumers reacted sharply too, with pork consumption falling 50% or more in the last week of April. These panic reactions by consumers are why farmers and food producers so fear food safety scares. New Hampshire pork producers rely primarily on local markets, and have not suffered price drops, reports Ed Merrill of Franklin. He and his wife Kiko used to sell fed hogs to markets in Connecticut and Pennsylvania at commodity prices. Now most of their sales are feeder pigs to local buyers who raise them.

Lorraine Merrill, Commissioner